

Negro Life in a 'White Cloud'

By JANE MCCHESNEY
Executive Editor

What is it like to be a Negro on an all-white campus? "I came to Westmont because I wanted a Christian college. I would do it again, but only for two years — it has had too bad an effect on me," answers senior Audrey Davis.

Barbara Allen, a freshman, adds, "Some people here try to be so friendly that they go overboard. Others don't know how to act so they just don't. At home you don't talk to whites, and it's hard to make the transition from a Negro to a white environment."

Audrey came to Westmont from a Portland high school where five or 10 of the 2,500 students were Negroes. If she were to begin college again, she would pick a large university instead.

"Westmont isn't like lots of schools; it's not conducive to Negroes because most of the kids have had absolutely no contact with Negroes."

"On the first day people stare at you. Sometimes later friends tell you they were afraid to get to know you in the beginning." And now that she has been here four years? "I have my own circle of friends and stick pretty much to them."

Audrey's experiences at Westmont, where for three years she was the only Negro girl, have had some decided effects on her. "I find myself feeling hostile and reluctant to make new friends. I don't date. I feel like I'm acquainted with your culture, but you have no knowledge of mine."

People have reacted to her in different ways, and the extremes on either side hurt. She has sometimes felt the repercussions from family members of some of her friends. Other times she has felt like a "token" of integration when students she barely knows are so eager to introduce her as "my friend, Audrey Davis."

PERSONALITY CHANGES

"The thing is—I'm afraid it's made me resentful or hostile. It has probably affected my personality. And

another thing—you know how rumor and gossip spread at Westmont. That and a stereotype really make it bad."

Audrey feels that one of her most important problems has stemmed from a struggle for identity here. "It's really hard to decide whether to give in or be 'you' even if it means being different than everyone around you. It's the struggle of whether to be a white Negro or a Negro."

Barbara Allen, in only her second quarter at Westmont, has found the transition doubly hard because she is from Jackson, Mississippi, where integration began only three or four years ago. There are no white students in the Negro high schools such as Barbara's, and only six Negroes "at the most" in the white schools.

She never thought much about Westmont being all white, but when she boarded the airplane in September "I began to think. There were no Negroes on the plane. I was alone. At the airport in Memphis I couldn't talk to anyone" because you don't take liberties in the South.

"Memphis to L.A. wasn't so bad. Then my aunt and uncle brought me up here — wow! At home we could call that coming under a 'white cloud!'"

INITIAL REACTION

Barb recalls the first month as "terrible," but then it got better. "I accept this as part of life, part of learning. As I've come to new experiences in my life, I've sometimes felt like dropping out. But this is part of life. You learn not just by studying and education, but by living with people."

"Some Negro kids couldn't come here. Because Westmont is a Christian college, you expect more of it, but some people look at you and talk to you — and they're looking at your skin."

"Last summer Westmont wrote to my roommate and told her that her roommate was going to be a Negro. I didn't mind that, but they didn't write to tell me my roommate would be a white. That's prejudice. It would

have been more Christian if neither of us had been written."

Recently the word "nigger" came up frequently in a story in one of her classes and was avoided in class discussion. "People are embarrassed to talk about it, but I'm not embarrassed because this is what I live with, and this is what they must live with."

"Students here aren't interested in civil rights because they can't face what is their world. They've really been shielded too much—many have never known Negroes before."

UNBALANCED EFFORT

Barbara feels Westmont is trying "so hard" not to be prejudiced, because of its Christian atmosphere. But sometimes it is unbalanced. "If you choose me on the one characteristic of being a Negro, I don't care about your friendship. What if I change color? Not very likely, I admit."

"But what if I was your friend just because of the color of your hair, and you changed it? If I feel I can do something for you and you can do something for me, we have something in common and we can be friends."

Barb picked Westmont from a list of Christian colleges and was encouraged by her pastor to apply. "Black power advocates today talk about the 'white man's God.' I don't believe that, but at one time I had doubts that you can't imagine."

"If I ever believed He was really the white man's God, I would try to destroy everything because my world would fall down."

She plans to stay on at Westmont—"from anybody's view this is a beautiful place, and I don't just mean the scenery. In every class I feel the warmth of Christ."

"But Westmont needs to have a second look at itself. So many leave here with the same ideas as when they came in. I've heard about Westmont students living sheltered lives, and they really do."